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ABSTRACT

A study was done to determine enrollment, persistence and graduation patterns of domestic special action students at the University of California Davis. Special action students are the small portion who are admitted despite not meeting undergraduate eligibility requirements (specific course work, grade point average and standardized test scores) but who show potential for academic success. This population of students is not homogeneous and not all are substantially under prepared as some may be technically ineligible because they lack one or two required courses. The data for the study came from a longitudinal database of undergraduates derived from the university student record system. The data show that Whites make up the largest single group of special action students (36 percent) followed by Blacks (24 percent). On academic persistence, these students' fourth quarter persistence rates have increased over the last 15 years from 70 percent in the mid-1970s to 80 percent more recently. Graduation rates differed by ethnic group with Asian and White students having the highest graduation rates followed by Latinos, Chicanos, and Blacks. Although special action graduation rates have increased overall, they continue to be about 25 to 30 percentage points below those of regularly admitted students. (JB)

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RESEARCH SYNOPSIS

Student Affairs
Research and Information

No. 40 January 1991

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RESEARCH SYNOPSIS

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ENROLLMENT, PERSISTENCE & GRADUATION OF UNDERGRADUATES ADMITTED TO UC DAVIS BY SPECIAL ACTION: 1975-1989

The University of California permits its campuses to admit a small portion of applicants who do not meet undergraduate eligibility requirements (i.e., specific course work, grade point average and standardized test scores) but who show potential for academic success. Previous research indicates that these students, admitted by special action, persist and graduate at rates lower than eligible students. This report describes enrollment, persistence and graduation patterns of domestic special action students at UC Davis.

Neither the population of students admitted by special action as a whole nor its subpopulations are homogeneous. Moreover, not every student admitted by special action is substantially under-prepared. Some students, for example, may be technically ineligible because they lack one or two required courses.

Size of the Population

Current University policy allows each campus to admit up to 6% of freshmen and 4% of advanced standing students in exception to the eligibility requirements. In Fall 1991, a revised "Policy on Undergraduate Admissions by Exception" goes into effect, increasing the proportion of advanced standing students allowable to 6%.

The revised policy also explicitly states that these proportions should be based on the number of newly enrolled students (freshmen and advanced standing). Because acceptance rates of students admitted by special action are higher than those of their regularly admitted cohorts, basing their proportions on the numbers of students admitted has, in the past, resulted in larger numbers (and proportions) of them enrolling at the University.

Special action students constitute well over 6% of newly enrolled undergraduates at UC Davis and, as the data on Table 1 (page following) indicate, have done so for several years.

Although their proportions fluctuate slightly annually, during the last five years special action entrants to UC Davis have averaged approximately 9% of newly enrolled students from high school and 11% of newly enrolled advanced standing students. In Fall 1989, the figures were 10% and 10.5%, respectively.

TABLE 1
Special Action as a Percent of New Domestic Undergraduate Enrollment by Entering Class Level
Fall 1975-1989

Entered Fall	High School			Advanced Standing			New Enrollment		
	All	Special		All	Special		All	Special	
	n	n	Percent	n	n	Percent	n	n	Percent
1975	2255	119	5.3%	1818	88	4.8%	4073	207	5.1%
1976	1987	126	6.3	1493	72	4.8	3480	198	5.7
1977	2082	115	5.5	1245	90	7.2	3327	205	6.2
1978	2245	159	7.1	1342	111	8.3	3587	270	7.5
1979	2652	198	7.5	1263	146	11.6	3915	344	8.8
1980	3029	227	7.5	1176	111	9.4	4205	338	8.0
1981	2721	165	6.1	919	81	8.8	3640	246	6.8
1982	2495	208	8.3	1009	89	8.8	3504	297	8.5
1983	2422	212	8.8	1009	104	10.3	3431	316	9.2
1984	2986	259	8.7	1135	131	11.5	4121	390	9.5
1985	2700	240	8.9	991	117	11.8	3691	357	9.7
1986	2451	215	8.8	892	111	12.4	3343	326	9.8
1987	3317	259	7.8	1007	104	10.3	4324	363	8.4
1988	3378	309	9.1	1107	131	11.8	4485	440	9.8
1989	3092	308	10.0	1236	130	10.5	4328	438	10.1

Relationship between Special Action Admissions and Student Affirmative Action

Although one objective of the University policy for special action is to increase the enrollment of students from underrepresented ethnic groups (American Indian, Black, Chicano and Latino), special action students and students from these affirmative action ethnic groups are distinct populations. As

TABLE 2
New Special Action Domestic Undergraduate Enrollment by Ethnic Group
Fall 1975-1989

Entered Fall	New Special Action Enrollment					
	Total*	Black	Chicano	Latino	Asian	White
	n	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
1975	207	28.0%	15.5%	3.9%	6.3%	27.5%
1976	198	31.8	11.6	2.0	6.1	30.8
1977	205	27.8	10.7	3.4	10.2	39.5
1978	270	30.4	7.4	6.7	5.9	41.5
1979	344	19.2	7.8	2.0	8.1	53.8
1980	338	17.5	7.1	1.8	11.2	49.1
1981	246	28.5	9.3	3.7	11.0	33.7
1982	297	22.2	9.4	4.0	10.8	42.4
1983	316	23.4	6.3	4.4	10.1	44.0
1984	390	21.3	10.5	5.1	11.8	40.0
1985	357	19.9	14.0	2.5	11.8	41.5
1986	326	23.6	10.4	4.9	10.1	39.9
1987	363	16.3	11.6	6.6	9.6	46.8
1988	440	20.9	13.9	7.0	9.8	33.9
1989	438	24.0	16.2	7.5	9.8	36.3

* Totals include the following categories: American Indian, Filipino, Other and Decline to State. Because of the small number of American Indian and Filipino special action students, data are not presented separately for them. In Fall 1989, they were 2.7% and 0.9% of special action entrants, respectively.

the data on Table 2 illustrate, White students made up the largest single group of new special action students in Fall 1989 (36.3%), followed by Black (24%), Chicano (16.2%), Asian (9.8%), and Latino (7.5%) students. Thus, only about half of the students benefiting from the special action admissions policy in Fall 1989 (50.4%) came from underrepresented ethnic groups.

Another source of confusion about the distinction between special action and affirmative action arises from the fact that, although not all special action students come from underrepresented ethnic groups, they do make up a disproportionately larger share of those groups. A comparison of the data on Tables 2 and 3 illustrates this point. Of all new special action students enrolled in Fall 1989, 36.3% were White; however, of all new White students, only 6.3% were admitted by special action. Conversely, while Black students made up only 24% of new special action students enrolling in Fall 1989, half of all new Black students (49.8%) were admitted by special action.

TABLE 3
Special Action as a Proportion of New Domestic Undergraduate Enrollment by Ethnic Group
Fall 1975-1989

Entered	New Domestic Enrollment									
Fall	Black		Chicano		Latino		Asian		White	
	All n	Special Percent	All n	Special Percent	All n	Special Percent	All n	Special Percent	All n	Special Percent
1975	115	*50.4%*	104	*30.8%*	43	*18.6%*	319	*4.1%*	3215	*1.8%*
1976	105	*60.0*	96	*24.0*	41	*9.8*	272	*4.4*	2733	*2.2*
1977	112	*50.9*	95	*23.2*	41	*17.1*	312	*6.7*	2585	*3.1*
1978	134	*61.2*	81	*24.7*	77	*23.4*	330	*4.8*	2770	*4.0*
1979	128	*51.6*	106	*25.5*	65	*10.8*	379	*7.4*	3001	*6.2*
1980	114	*51.8*	114	*21.1*	65	*9.2*	438	*8.7*	3059	*5.4*
1981	149	*47.0*	124	*18.5*	64	*14.1*	370	*7.3*	2606	*3.2*
1982	133	*49.6*	133	*21.1*	77	*15.6*	452	*7.1*	2457	*5.1*
1983	132	*56.1*	88	*22.7*	70	*20.0*	465	*6.9*	2423	*5.7*
1984	160	*51.9*	138	*29.7*	78	*25.6*	627	*7.3*	2768	*5.6*
1985	158	*44.9*	178	*28.1*	66	*13.6*	551	*7.6*	2429	*6.1*
1986	154	*50.0*	136	*25.0*	77	*20.8*	561	*5.9*	2040	*6.4*
1987	139	*42.4*	189	*22.2*	100	*24.0*	794	*4.4*	2723	*6.2*
1988	187	*49.2*	227	*26.9*	113	*27.4*	839	*5.1*	2607	*5.7*
1989	211	*49.8*	259	*27.4*	129	*25.6*	825	*5.2*	2519	*6.3*

Special action admissions also account for a large proportion of all new Chicano and Latino entrants. Percentages vary somewhat over time but, for the last three years, about one-fourth of all new Chicano and Latino students were admitted by special action.

Persistence and Graduation Rates

Previous research indicates that special action students do not persist or graduate at rates equal to those of their regularly admitted cohorts.[1] This finding is not surprising, given the large number of special action students entering with some academic skill deficiencies and coming from economically or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. Nevertheless, fourth quarter persistence rates of special action students have increased over the last fifteen years. Special action cohorts entering in the mid-1970s had fourth quarter persistence rates of approximately 70%. Since Fall 1982, as Table 4

[1]For a list of recent campus research on persistence and graduation of UC Davis undergraduates, see RESEARCH SYNOPSIS No. 38, *Graduation Rates of UC Davis Undergraduates: Students Entering 1975-1984* (November 1990).

indicates, 80% or more of each succeeding class of special action students persisted at least four quarters. This increase is generally true for both freshman and advanced standing special action entrants.

This increase in fourth quarter persistence rates should hearten the campus as a whole; in part, it reflects the efforts of individuals responsible for support programs serving these students in their first year. As Table 5 indicates, graduation rates of special action students have increased several percentage points since the mid-1970s, although they do not show as marked a change as persistence rates. The graduation rates of special action students entering in Fall 1982, 1983 and 1984 are all about 10 percentage points higher than those rates of students entering 1975-78.

TABLE 4
Special Action Students Persisting Four or More Quarters by Entering Class Level
Fall 1975-1988

Entered	High School		Advanced Standing		All Special Action	
Fall	Entrants	Persisters	Entrants	Persisters	Entrants	Persisters
	n	Percent	n	Percent	n	Percent
1975	119	69%	88	70%	207	70%
1976	126	76	72	63	198	71
1977	115	75	90	67	205	71
1978	159	79	111	73	270	77
1979	198	79	146	74	344	77
1980	227	87	111	68	338	80
1981	165	82	81	74	246	79
1982	208	78	89	83	297	80
1983	212	83	104	79	316	81
1984	259	84	131	81	390	83
1985	240	85	117	80	357	83
1986	215	88	111	79	326	85
1987	259	84	104	87	363	85
1988	309	83	131	84	440	83

Note: Persistence rates as of Spring 1990.

TABLE 5
Graduation Rates of Special Action Students by Entering Class Level
Fall 1975-1984

Entered	High School		Advanced Standing		All Special Action	
Fall	Entrants	Graduates	Entrants	Graduates	Entrants	Graduates
	n	Percent	n	Percent	n	Percent
1975	119	34%	88	45%	207	39%
1976	126	32	72	38	198	34
1977	115	32	90	41	205	36
1978	159	38	111	32	270	35
1979	198	52	146	51	344	52
1980	227	49	111	49	338	49
1981	165	39	81	46	246	41
1982	208	46	89	55	297	49
1983	212	43	104	52	316	49
1984	259	44	131	56	390	48

Note: Graduation rates as of Spring 1990.

The numbers of special action graduates within some ethnic groups are small and fluctuate widely from year to year, making it difficult to identify patterns or trends. However, the data on Table 6 do indicate that graduation rates differ by ethnic group within the special action population. In general, Asian and White students have the highest graduation rates, followed by Latinos, Chicanos and Blacks.

TABLE 6
Graduation Rates of Special Action Undergraduates by Ethnicity
Fall 1975-1984

Entered Fall	Black		Chicano		Latino		Asian		White	
	Entrants n	Graduates Percent	Entrants n	Graduates Percent	Entrants n	Graduates Percent	Entrants n	Graduates Percent	Entrants n	Graduates Percent
1975	58	41%	32	41%	8	38%	13	62%	57	44%
1976	63	30	23	26	4	25	12	50	61	51
1977	57	25	22	45	7	0	21	43	81	49
1978	82	34	20	35	18	11	16	44	112	41
1979	66	38	27	48	7	57	28	64	185	56
1980	59	37	24	46	6	67	38	55	166	53
1981	70	31	23	30	9	78	27	52	83	46
1982	66	39	28	57	12	42	32	63	126	52
1983	74	28	20	45	14	36	32	66	139	61
1984	83	30	41	37	20	45	46	48	156	57

Note: Graduation rates as of Spring 1990. Because of the small number of American Indian and Filipino special action students, data are not presented separately for them. Ten year graduation rates (1975-84) for these students are 18% and 44%, respectively.

Although special action graduation rates have increased overall, they continue to be about 25 to 30 percentage points below those of regularly admitted students. A comparison of graduation rates between classes of special action students and their regularly admitted cohorts appears on Table 7.

TABLE 7
Graduation Rates of Regular and Special Action Students by Entering Class Level
Fall 1975-1984

Entered Fall	High School		Advanced Standing		Total	
	Regular	Special	Regular	Special	Regular	Special
1975	68%	34%	72%	45%	70%	39%
1976	70	32	70	38	70	34
1977	66	32	74	41	69	36
1978	69	38	75	32	71	35
1979	70	52	73	51	71	52
1980	72	49	74	49	72	49
1981	72	39	78	46	74	41
1982	77	46	73	55	76	49
1983	76	43	81	52	77	49
1984	75	44	78	56	76	48

Note: Graduation rates as of Spring 1990.

This finding is not unique to the Davis campus. According to *Undergraduate Retention and Graduation at the University of California* (Office of the President, University of California, July 1989), the Universitywide five-year continuation/graduation rate of all Fall 1982 special action freshmen is 43% (46% for Davis), compared with a 65% rate for regularly admitted freshmen from that year.

Data Source

Data for this report come from the Composite Undergraduate File (CUF), a longitudinal database of undergraduates derived directly from the Student Records System (SRS) and maintained by Student Affairs Research and Information. Data herein come from the Spring 1990 CUF update. Because of record changes and error corrections, the contents of both the SRS and CUF change over time. Accordingly, these data represent our best current knowledge, but may differ slightly from those released in previous reports or from other University sources.

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